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Amber had always been a little awkward.

Part of that had undoubtedly been because she was the neighborhood laughingstock. She had grown up in one of those really tight communities in the city, where everyone knew everyone else, and more importantly everyone else’s business. And Amber’s business had been, for the longest time, making herself look like a complete and total idiot out of herself in social gatherings.

Without fail, if there were as much as just *two* sets of eyes on her, and she’d stick her foot in her mouth and make everyone around her uncomfortable. Or trip, fall, and destroy pretty much everything in her immediate vicinity. Or suddenly find out that she had been wearing her pants backwards all day that day, and that nobody had opted to tell her until that very moment.

And in a place as big as her home town, there was almost always someone to screw up in front of.

Sometimes, she swore that it felt like the universe was out to get her—that she’d had a cosmic Kick Me! sign on her back ever since the day she was born.

Getting away from it all had been her primary reason for moving to Knubbig in the first place.

A tiny town where nobody knew her and she was free to make a fresh start. A small, cozy slice of suburbia where she could begin a new page in the book that was to be the metaphorical autobiography of Amber Sterns, where she could finally—

“You know that you’re not supposed to park here… right?”

A quick glance over, and Amber was suddenly very aware of the police officer that was hanging in her open driver’s side window. She jumped back, only to be caught in the glare from her reflective lenses against the sun, which made her wince and lean back further, reaching her hand out to block the bright light from her vision.

And so, when a civilian screams and raises their hand up to a cop—regardless as to whether or not the cop was supposed to be hanging in your window—bad things tend to happen.

It could have been a lot worse.

But Amber getting tossed into jail for disorderly conduct against a police officer was hardly the way she’d envisioned her first day in her new job as the mayor’s secretary. When she got her phone back a few hours later and saw that she had no less than *seventeen* missed calls from her new boss, Amber had pretty much assumed that she was fired on the spot.

“What do you *mean* that you got arrested?!”

And how do you explain that you were hauled into jail for assault on a police officer for the better part of the afternoon in retaliation for getting spooked while parking in a government parking space that you hadn’t gotten your sticker for *because it was your first day on the job*?

At this point, Amber hadn’t even been surprised that she’d been fired without even setting foot inside City Hall…

Could this day have gotten any worse?

“Hey—HEY! You just backed into my car!”

Because of course it could have.

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By the time that Amber finally arrived home, it was late into the afternoon.

She was tired, exhausted, and had endured one of the worst days in her entire life. On what was supposed to be the first day of the rest of her life. Her new, exciting, not horrible, never embarrassing, super cool life where she got to start over in a small town that had no idea what a colossal screw-up she was.

Correction: a town that *hadn’t* known what a colossal screw up she was, until she’d been arrested by the chief of police and then backed into one of the town’s most prolific and popular people’s very nice, very expensive foreign car, and had been reamed by the mayor personally for dipping out on her first day on the clock because she’d been *arrested for* (allegedly) *assaulting a police officer.*

Amber was *not* having a good day.

In fact, as far as her screw-ups go, this one probably took the cake.

“Fuuuuuuuck my liiiiiiiiife.”

Amber collapsed into the unpacked apartment that she couldn’t afford without her nice cushy job from the city onto the mattress, the only piece of furniture that she had outside of a nightstand and kitchen cabinets, because she was going to wait to get more with her first paycheck.

Laying spread eagle on her mattress and sniffling to herself seemed about the only thing that she could do at a time like this.

“Have I like, done something wrong?”

She asked no one in particular as she stared at the ceiling, her vision becoming increasingly blurry as tears began to well in her eyes.

“Have I… Was I like, Hitler in a past life or something? Is that why I can’t go one goddamn day without something horrible happening to me?”

She used the back of her hand to wipe away the tears, smearing them across her face as her makeup began to run.

“I’ve had bad days before but this… this just takes the cake…”

She started to sob more violently now, her chest heaving as the sorrow overtook her resilience.

“I don’t know why I’m such a fuck-up…”

Her voice began to crack and strain under the pressure.

“I’d do anything to fix all of this.”

And as the faint smell of sulfur began to flit into the air, Amber’s nose was too clogged with snot to tell the difference. The heat of hellfire paled to the heat behind her tears. And the overwhelming sense of dread that entered the apartment as a figure flickered into view through fire could never have topped the sense of loss that entrenched her now.

“Anything?” a low voice asked, “Because… if you say anything, you’ve got to *mean* anything.”

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You can kind of get the gist of what happened from there.

The general reaction to finding out that someone had effectively materialized into your home.

You’ve read it before, seen it on TV… we don’t need to go through the whole song and dance.

Suffice it to say that Amber was surprised by the sudden appearance of another woman in her otherwise empty apartment. She had surely locked the doors before she had flung herself down into melancholia, hadn’t she?

But there was a woman standing in her apartment, no taller than five and a quarter feet tall, with long blonde curls and decked out in dazzling red business casual—gripping a clipboard and rocking on her heels, black flats clicking against the hardwood floor.

“You’re telling me that you can *reverse* all of my bad luck.” Amber repeated, still drying her eyes, “Just like that?”

“Of course we can!” Devlin—that was the woman’s name, I know really subtle—said with a smile and a click of her pen, “Helping mortals work around the so called “blessings” that He has left them with in a misguided attempt to provide obstacles in one’s personal narrative is pretty much the entirety of our job description!”

There was a small pause.

“That is, the organization to which I’ve been assigned.”

“Which would be…?”

Another small pause, though a bit longer than the first, as Devlin guided Amber’s eye up and down her attire. From the tip of her coal black flats, up the scandalously short red skirt, the matching blazer and black blouse combination, all the way up to her perfectly, sparkly red winged eyelids and immaculately groomed eyebrows.

“Take a guess.”

“Oh.” Amber gave pause, “So you’re…”

“I came to you in a cloud of brimstone and hellfire—did you really think that I was Saint Peter?”

Amber sniffled again, rubbing the back of her button nose with the back of her hand.

“All it takes is a couple of signatures, a little legal hocus pocus, and I can make you the most charming woman that Knubbig’s ever seen!”

“C-Can you get me my job back too?”

“I suppose we could throw that in… as a sort of Incentive Bonus, of course—after all, persuading the minds of mortal men, women, and all those that lay between and outside of those categories are but mere parlor tricks.”

She clicked her pen once more, a small spark flaring from the tip.

“For the right price.”

A third, longer, and much more poignant pause.

“I don’t know…” Amber curled up into her knees on the bed, looking down contemplatively at the bare mattress that had been a perfect metaphor for her new life in Knubbig, “Isn’t the usual *price* for people who work in your—”

“Department.”

“—right, isn’t the usual price something along the lines of…?”

“Your immortal soul?”

“R-Right…”

“Oh please. Most of the time peoples’ souls wind up coming to us *anyway*. It’d be like giving away something for free. And neither He nor We are in the market for that sort of thing…”

“So… what do you want in exchange?” Amber leaned in closer, “I-I mean, if it’s not my soul…”

And here, in a brief chuckle, Devlin’s true nature became more apparent. A low, husky thing that made the skin crawl on the back of Amber’s neck, and goosebumps travel up the length of her arms. Hugging the clipboard close against her infernal chest, the small woman’s shoulders bounced in a wicked delight.

If Amber hadn’t been convinced that the strange woman standing in her apartment was a demon before…

“Well, there’s the interesting part…”

Devlin took a few steps forward, bent down slightly so that she was eye level to Amber on the bed, and flipped over her clipboard.

“You see, each devil is assigned a particular department correlating to certain sins.” Devil said with a tap of some graphs and charts that were distressingly mobile for being printed on seemingly ordinary paper, “You’ve got your Pride demons, your Wrath demons… you get my drift.”

Amber didn’t really.

“My job is to tempt mortals into performing acts that correspond to a particular sin—and in return to me for granting you the uncanny ability to charm the pants off of anyone that you’d like and keep your feet out of your mouth, *you* will help me get these numbers up.”

Amber, however briefly, touched the clipboard.

She recoiled instantly, and wished that she hadn’t.

“So that makes me some kind of… Devil’s Advocate?”

“…we prefer the term Field Agent.”

“Right…”

Devlin extended the pen towards the woman on the bed, who instinctively reached out to touch it, only to hesitate at the last second.

“If I help you… get your numbers up, or whatever… I don’t have to give you my soul? *And* I get what I want?”

“If you help me get these numbers up, you don’t have to give me a damned thing.” Devlin smiled again, her voice lowering to a friendly, but unnerving contralto, “I’ll even point you in the right direction. I’d say that after a day like today, you’ve got some pent-up aggression you’d like to exercise, hm?”

Amber’s eyes darted to the pen again.

“A brand-new life as the charming City Gal who came to little country nothing Knubbig one day and changed things forever—accident free and popular with everybody in this speck of a city—you could absolutely *run* this place and you can have it all for the itsy-bitsy price of some legwork and a couple of signatures, initials, and a notary stamp.”

The ethical dilemma of making a deal with a devil weighed heavily on her. Amber had never been particularly religious; but then, she’d never come face to face with a religious figure before. Making this kind of deal… it hadn’t seemed smart. There were decades, *centuries* of literature and media telling her that this kind of thing never ended well…

But after a day like today, someone swooping in and promising to make it all better for the price of her signature sounded great…

Even if it came with a little legwork

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Against her own better judgement, but in accordance with the instructions of the mysterious devil woman who had entered her apartment the night before, Amber took her first steps into the Knubbig City Hall building just a little under twenty-four hours late.

And in one interaction, she felt that she would almost immediately regret it.

“Finally decided to show up for work?” a deep voice came from the right, “Or did you come here with a better excuse as to why you couldn’t show up for work yesterday?”

Amber had recognized her voice from the many phone calls that they’d had before she’d moved out to Knubbig; it belonged to none other than Sherry Klines, the mayor of the town she’d moved to—and the person who had hired her on good faith with only over-the-phone interviews.

Somehow, Amber got the feeling that she regretted that decision.

Sherry Kline was an intimidating woman to be stared down by. On the business end of that glare, her furrowed brown brow felt like it could melt steel. And the fact that she was broadly built hadn’t hurt either. Even if she hadn’t been as stocky and cornfed as some of the other Knubbig natives, there was a certain power to her presence that Amber hadn’t felt since the last time she’d upset her own mother…

“Okay, I know that you’re upset.” Amber said with her hands held up in de-escalation, “But I brought in the paperwork that they gave me when they let me out of jail yesterday.”

Amber handed over a neatly folded packet of papers. She hadn’t really gotten them from the police officer behind the desk yesterday, but rather they had been left on her nightstand this morning, along with a little red business card.

“And here’s the insurance paperwork and the ticket from the auto accident that I told you I got into…”

That she did have on her person—as evident by the fact that it had gotten crumpled and creased.

Mayor Kline snatched the papers out of Amber’s hands and gave them a quick once-over. Satisfied with their legitimacy, her gaze softened.

“You had a really *really* bad day yesterday, didn’t you?” Mayor Kline asked with a cocked eyebrow, “Jailed for *assaulting a police officer* and then they let you out and you back into the richest woman in town’s car?”

Amber sighed.

“You have *no idea.”* She chuckled weakly, “I came back here today to hopefully, *maybe* explain what happened—that way, even if I *didn’t* get my job back, I’d still get off on the right foot in your town.”

Mayor Kline narrowed her eyes dubiously at Amber’s surprisingly mature response.

“And you’re sure that it doesn’t have anything to do with trying to get the mayor to pull a string or two for you?” she cracked a small smile, “I mean, it *is* my fault that you didn’t have the right stickers to park in the space outside.”

“Yeah, but it’s my fault that I freaked out when she popped her head into the window.”

“That sounds like Linda.” The mayor rolled her eyes, “Look at you; not even in town for a full day and you got arrested *personally* by the Chief of Police.”

Amber gulped.

“I’ll see what I can do.” Mayor Kline offered a smile, “In the meantime, why don’t we get you caught up on what you missed yesterday—after all, it isn’t every day that we get somebody with your skillset in Knubbig…”

Amber’s eyes widened in disbelief as, for what felt like the first time in her life, things *didn’t* go the worst possible way. Her boss had forgiven her, just like that!

As the tall woman put an arm around her shoulder, guiding Amber through the modest city hall, Amber could feel her heart skip a beat. The deal had worked—it had really, really worked! That Devlin woman had tipped the scales in her favor, and now things were going to start looking up!

She was so happy that she could cry—and for once, she didn’t have to worry about her tears smearing her boss’s suit and getting her fired, or getting bleary-eyed and walking face-first into the wall…

Things were really, really going to be better from now on!

*With a little legwork…*

“H-Hey, um… Ms. Kline… I know that it’s probably not the best time in the world, but do you think that we could talk about all of this over breakfast?” Amber asked suddenly, almost as if it were an afterthought, “I was so nervous about coming here and talking to you about all of this that I didn’t eat breakfast this morning…”

“I think that we can arrange a little something.” Mayor Kline laughed, “Honestly, I wasn’t hungry until you walked in anyway—staying mad all morning must have killed my appetite.”

“I know a great artisanal donut place downtown; they’ve got the best apple fritters.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Amber could swear that she saw Devlin leaning against the wall, her clipboard primed and readied in one hand while she watched them steer towards the door.

With a blink, she was gone.

“I thought you said that you’d only been in town for one day? How did you know about Apple Dumplin’s?”

Amber’s gaze shifted nervously back to where she could have sworn that she saw Devlin.

“A, uh… friend told me about it.” Amber said in a noncommittal tone, “She said that it was the best place in town to go to.”

“Well, it *also* just so happens to be my own personal kryptonite.” The good mayor laughed, “I swear, if City Hall were just a mile closer to that place, I’d probably weigh three hundred pounds.”

Amber chuckled awkwardly. She couldn’t see Devlin smiling, but she could feel it.

“Well, let’s get started, then!”